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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR ADMIRAL ULRICH'S MAY 2006 VISIT TO
NIGERIA

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell Hanks for reasons 1.4
(B) and (D).

¶1. (U) Your visit to Nigeria comes at a critical time in the country's political evolution. Increasing instability in the lower Niger River Delta threatens the nation's oil production, the government's primary source of income; continuing outbreaks of avian influenza threaten the nation's poultry industry, the source of livelihood for thousands of Nigerians and the primary source of protein for millions more; a recent wave of sectarian violence demonstrates how quickly religious and ethnic sentiments can become inflamed; and Nigeria is lurching towards a presidential election. Next year President Olusegun Obasanjo comes to the end of his second (and, under the current constitution, his last) term. The 2007 polls will be the third set of presidential elections since the end of military rule in 1999, and may mark the first transition in Nigeria's history from one elected regime to another.

THE POLITICS OF THE MOMENT

¶2. (U) For the past several months, Nigeria's political establishment has been obsessed with the question of whether or not President Obasanjo would seek a third term in office. Supporters of a constitutional amendment bill that, among other changes, would have enabled Obasanjo to seek a third term, were accused of using bribery and intimidation to garner support for the bill in the National Assembly. Anti-third term protests occurred in many states, and major political figures, including Vice President Atiku Abubakar, national legislators, state governors, especially those from the north, made public statements against the third term. On May 16, the House and Senate simultaneously killed the constitutional amendment bill. In what appeared to be a pre-determined outcome, following several hours of debate, the bill was defeated after proponents of the third term were unable to garner the simple majority in the House or the Senate needed to continue action on the bill.

¶3. (U) With the third term issue off the table, Nigerians can finally shift their focus to preparations for the 2007 election. There are no clear leading candidates. Vice President Atiku has made no secret of his aspirations to the office, but he has not received President Obasanjo's backing. Rather, he has had several public altercations with the President which generated significant media attention. One of the President's spokesmen went so far as to advise the Vice President to resign. Along with Atiku, ex-military

rulers Buhari and Babangida and former Lagos military governor Marwa are considered to be the principal contenders.

Abia State Governor Orji Kalu has declared his candidacy and claimed support from the other candidates, but is less well-known than his rivals. Several other candidates are now emerging, but none are of any great stature.

¶4. (U) Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) is responsible for voter registration and the conduct of the 2007 poll. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) delivered a "wake-up call" about election administrations deficiencies in a report issued at the conclusion of its international pre-election assessment mission completed on May 10. The report highlighted progress in some categories, but noted that critical work must be done immediately in order to ensure credible elections in 2007. Chief among NDI's recommendations were for INEC to issue an election calendar complete with deadlines for registration, nominations, etc., and to begin voter's registration and a public education campaign on the new voter's registration process and cards. The NDI assessment team also highlighted the need for the National Assembly to quickly pass the Electoral Act, currently in its final stages before the legislature, in order to clarify the rules of the game for the 2007 polls.

UNREST IN THE NIGER DELTA

¶5. (C) In January and again in February 2006, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) kidnapped thirteen expatriates, including four American citizens, and held them in jungle areas of Bayelsa and Delta States. The terms of the hostages' release remain unclear. The GON has established a commission to look into Delta regional development, but Ijaw leaders and militants are divided

regarding participation in the GON's efforts. The region remains poor, although it supplies the majority of the nation's wealth. This juxtaposition has created a climate of deep despair and anger, which has given rise to the current political crisis in the region. Little development has taken place in the region since oil was discovered there forty years ago. The emergence of MEND, which has also blown up oil installations, is a new and worrying trend in the region, although the underlying frustrations are endemic to the Niger Delta. MEND continues to issue threats against oil installations and expatriates via major media outlets. If pushed, the militants have said they would no longer take hostages, but rather kill anyone they found working in defiance of their "restrictions." An American citizen oil executive was killed in Port Harcourt on May 10 in an apparently unrelated attack, but this new style of dealing with expatriates in the region raises the stakes significantly for all parties involved.

¶6. (C) Any major military action could threaten the safety of current and future hostages, or promote more hostage-taking. While the GON has so far been able to restrain the military from rash action, the Chief of Defense Intelligence recently said that the military should have a greater role in resolving hostage situations.

THE MILITARY'S CONCERNS

¶7. (C) While the Nigerian military has been better funded, more professional and clearly subordinate to civilian rule since Obasanjo came to power, it is still undermanned, under-equipped, and under-trained for its myriad international peacekeeping and internal security assignments. The high operational tempo required to maintain its many deployments within and without Nigeria gives little rest to the weary. It is unclear how long the current pace can be maintained. Although there is no sign of breakdown at the moment, the Army Chief of Staff recently commented that the army would be hard-pressed to come up with additional troops

for Darfur and maintain its domestic security missions.

18. (U) Despite Nigeria's position as the anchor of U.S.-supported peacekeeping operations in the region, Congressionally-imposed sanctions for the October 2001 Benue massacre (lifted in 2004) and the protracted presence of Charles Taylor reduced a security assistance program that had been the second largest in sub-Saharan Africa. While Charles Taylor was recently sent to face justice in Sierra Leone, and Nigeria also claims partial credit for brokering the recent African Union (AU) led agreement reached in the Darfur peace talks, assistance programs have not yet been fully resuscitated. Nevertheless, a significant number of military-military activities continue. A seminar with the Nigerian Air Force to develop a strategic vision, a robust DOD HIV/AIDS program and an active humanitarian assistance program are in operation. In addition, several important new programs are underway, one of which links up the Nigerian military with the California National Guard as part of the State Partnership Program. Of special note in view of Nigeria's major peacekeeping commitments, training under the Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance Program (ACOTA), began in April.

19. (U) The senior Nigerian military leadership seems to see participation in peacekeeping missions, especially UN operations, as a means of restoring both soldiers' pride and public confidence in the military. Nigeria has two battallions of UN peacekeepers in Liberia and three battallions in the African Union Mission in the Darfur region of Sudan. President Obasanjo has mentioned the possibility of committing troops to missions in Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire, and DROC, but he has not stated where these soldiers would come from.

110. (C) Another new initiative is beginning to take shape. Thanks in part to the impetus given to the process by your last visit, the US-UK-Nigeria talks on Gulf of Guinea security are moving forward. At the most recent session in Washington 28 April, the USG offered to work with the GON to develop a train and equip program aimed at building a riverine capability for operations in the Delta. A joint US-UK-Nigeria assessment team visit, planned for 19-23 June, will develop a detailed proposal that can be presented to the GON at the next meeting, expected in late July. In addition, in Washington, the GON agreed to receive a briefing team that

will make a presentation of the Regional Maritime Awareness Capability (RMAC) program and explore GON,s receptiveness to hosting an RMAC system.

SECURITY ISSUES

111. (U) While most Nigerians, including Muslims, are basically pro-American and look to the U.S. as a model in many fields, significant segments of the population oppose specific USG policies. In northern Nigeria, Palestine has long been a rallying point for opposition to USG policies, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have served to rekindle this opposition. Many Northern Nigerians think the U.S. misunderstands Sharia law.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES

112. (U) Nigeria's economic team continues to rack up successes in the international community. Despite concerns about increasing inflation, running now at about 18%, the economic team still earns high marks for prudently managing Nigeria's windfall revenues from high oil prices. Getting a credit rating for Nigeria's sovereign debt was a recent feather in the Finance Minister's cap. These glittering international successes are in stark contrast to serious domestic economic dissatisfaction. Nigeria's citizens are under severe pressure from rising fuel prices and rapidly

rising food prices. The business community sees little improvement in arbitrary policies and deteriorating infrastructure. Trade and investment issues are among the most contentious in the bilateral agenda. Nigeria has begun to implement the long awaited ECOWAS Common Economic Tariff, but its impact is not yet clear. While celebrating the good news that Nigeria actually showed some improvement in Transparency International's most recent Corruption Perception Index, Nigerians express continued and even growing frustration about corruption, viewed here as at a historically high level. Support for the government's anti-corruption efforts are undermined by the broad perception that investigations are politically motivated.

¶13. (U) On the most recent UNDP Human Development Index, Nigeria's score dropped due to falling life expectancy. More than seventy percent of Nigerians live in poverty, secondary school attendance and literacy are declining, and life expectancy is now only 43.4 years, driven mainly by high infant mortality. Due to the conflict over the safety of the U.N.-sponsored vaccination programs, efforts to rid Nigeria and the world of polio were unsuccessful by the U.N.-declared deadline at the end of 2005. HIV/AIDS is another factor in life expectancy and, of course, a huge component of our assistance in Nigeria. The Avian Influenza outbreak is predicted to have a severe impact on broad swath of the public. Commercial poultry production is a major industry and large employer. An even greater number of subsistence farmers rely on small backyard flocks to supplement their diet and cash income. Aside from the danger of an influenza epidemic, the outbreak is almost certain to reduce the food supplies of a population living on the nutritional edge.

CAMPBELL